



Annual Meeting of the Parish 2024

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Parish Council

Since the Parish Election last May there have been quite a number of changes in the Parish Council. We started the year with 6 elected members, two of which unfortunately resigned during the year. The parish has welcomed and co-opted 6 Councillors since then and is now operating with 10 councillors, with all seats filled. In 2023 we also said good-bye to our long-standing Parish Clerk, Ms Welham, who has supported the parish in a number of roles over their 13 years as Clerk. Many thanks are given to Cllr Urbick who had the time and qualifications to be the Proper Officer of the Council whilst a new Clerk was sought and appointed. Mrs White was appointed as Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer in mid-February.

I want to take a moment to thank the outgoing Chair, Cllr Peirce for their service to the Parish Council over a number of years. Robin isn't leaving the Parish Council and continues to be the Community Centre Liaison and full voting member of the Council. Their long tenure on the Council, detailed knowledge of what has gone before and level-headed advice is invaluable to all of us on the Council and we are all grateful for Robin's continued service.

The Parish Council has committed to a number of "big projects" in the parish, including adding another Speed Indicator Display (SID) to our inventory of village traffic calming measures, and funding the replacement flat roof on the pavilion of the Village Hall on behalf of the village Hall Trustees. At the time of writing, the planning application had been submitted for a replacement Zinc roof, which we hope will last for many years ahead, and will be less susceptible to ball damage. Unfortunately, our hoped-for additional zebra-crossing cannot go ahead due to the restrictions of the topography of the current path and land ownership. The restoration of the Greenmore Ponds project is also proceeding with the commitment of several thousands of pounds toward this.

The Parish made a number of grants in the 2023-2024 financial year, including £6,500 to the Friends of Woodcote Primary School (FOWPS) toward their new playground roof for the Reception Class, £2575 toward the running costs of the Youth Club & £1000 to St Leonards for grounds maintenance. The library was also supported with a grant of £2100, and Village Hall was granted £9,000 with addition support of £12,400 toward maintenance of the building. Whilst we have a finite pot of monies which we can grant, we do welcome applications from local organisations, the form can be found on our website.

Parish Council projects during the 2023-2024 year included, £3420 for a SID, £28,500 on basketball court repairs and £3400 on play equipment repairs/installation. Combined Staffing Costs remain fairly fixed at approximately 20% of the precept, which is below the average for South Oxfordshire and I hope you feel this is giving the parish value for money as we do.

As the first tier of local government, our processes can seem quite bureaucratic and at times daunting. If you have any questions about how or why we are doing something in a particular way, please .

As we head into the 2nd Council year for the current electoral period, it is important for all to remember that each elected or co-opted member volunteers their time and seeks to do what is best for the whole community. At times it can be a very difficult job, with little reward, and I thank those on the Council with me this year for their time and efforts.

Cllr Kevin Davies
Chair of the Council

Financial Summary

The following table details the final, end of year accounts by budget code for the most recently completed Financial Year: 2023-2024, and the previous financial year for comparison.

The reserve account contains funds that have been earmarked for specific purposes. Whilst £380,500 is a significant amount to hold in reserve, the council is currently working toward an Operating Reserve at a level of the recommended 50% of precept, circa £65,000 plus saving for significant infrastructure projects, such as large renovation projects on the village hall, on behalf of the trustees, and capital expenditure on the play equipment areas. A large amount of the total reserve is Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which the Council may only spend on specific sorts of projects.

NOTE: All figures to be considered draft, until accounts have been audited.

RECEIPTS

General Income		2022-23		2023-24	
1076	Precept	£	115,947	£	125,223
1080	Grass Cutting	£	1,199	£	1,199
1081	Recreation Ground Fees	£	1,000	£	750
1090	Bank Interest & Dividends	£	8,062	£	16,328
1095	Grants	£	2,000		
1098	S 106	£	-		
1101	Misc Income	£	1,198	£	4,835
1110	Recharges to Allotments	£	790	£	-
1120	CIL Funds	£	50,540	£	87,334
Total	All Receipts	£	180,736	£	235,669

PAYMENTS

Administration		2022-23		2023-24	
4000	Staff Costs	£	29,237	£	29,349
4020	Stationery	£	292	£	336
4021	Photocopying			£	-
4040	Telephone/Broadband	£	1,340	£	834
4041	Internet Services	£	168	£	139
4042	Software	£	477	£	1,645
4060	Office Equipment	£	89	£	142
4070	General Insurance	£	2,430	£	2,570
4080	Legal Costs	-£	306	£	7,940
4090	Chairman's Expenses	£	244	£	-
4091	Councillor's Expenses	£	50	£	-
4100	Audit Charges	£	680	£	770
4110	Village Communication	£	583	£	134
4120	Miscellaneous Expenses	£	100	£	471
4125	Training Costs	£	293	£	100
	Election Costs			£	200
	Room Hire			£	275
Total	Administration Costs	£	35,677	£	44,904

Woodcote

Subscriptions		2022-23		2023-24	
4201	ORCC	£	-	£	-
4202	Chiltern Soc	£	30	£	30
4203	CPRE	£	36	£	-
4204	OPFA			£	-
4205	Open Spaces	£	45	£	45
4205	OALC/SLCC	£	633	£	746
4207	CLT	£	150	£	-
4208	ICO	£	35	£	35
Total	Subscriptions	£	929	£	856

Miscellaneous Grants		2022-23		2023-24	
4301	S137 - Volunteers	£	340	£	357
4305	Woodcote Correspondent	£	750	£	3,000
4310	S214(6) Graveyard Maintenance	£	893	£	1,000
4320	Conservation Grp/Pond 1976 19.3	£	340	£	340
4330	CAB S142(2A)	£	-	£	630
4340	Royal British Legion S139(3)	£	63	£	29
Total	Miscellaneous Grants	£	2,386	£	5,356

Non-Committed Grants		2022-23		2023-24	
4401	Village Hall Grant			£	9,000
4402	Village Hall Bldg Maintenance	£	12,633	£	12,396
4410	Rec Ground (non-com grants) S14	£	-	£	-
4420	Community Centre S19	£	1,076	£	-
4440	Youth Worker S19/Youth Club	£	2,625	£	-
4450	Neighbourhood Plan	£	2,324	£	-
4460	Library S145	£	-	£	2,100
	S137 Grants			£	6,500
Total	Non-Committed Grants	£	18,658	£	29,996

Village Maintenance		2022-23		2023-24	
4501	Grass Cutting Contract	£	9,628	£	10,304
4510	Hedges, Verges, Trees, Village Maint.	£	10,130	£	7,692
4515	Climate Environment			£	-
4520	Dog Waste/Bins	£	2,216	£	1,840
4530	General			£	-
4540	Playground Inspection	£	172	£	227
4550	Playground Maintenance	£	910	£	172
4560	Village Maint/Improvements	£	2,513	£	39,040
4570	CIL Projects			£	2,543
Total	Village Maintenances	£	25,569	£	61,818

Potential Major Items		2022-23		2023-24	
4610	Traffic Management			£	6,550
Total	Potential Major Items			£	6,550

Total	All Payments	£	83,219	£	149,480
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Total	Receipts (Less CIL) less Payments	£	46,977	-£	1,145
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EARMARKED RESERVES	2022-23	2023-24
EMR Operating Reserve		£ 28,822.93
EMR Land for Burial	£ 20,000.00	£ 20,000.00
EMR 2nd Bus shelter	£ 5,000.00	£ 5,000.00
EMR Climate Change measures	£ 10,000.00	£ 10,000.00
EMR Capital for Projects	£ 38,791.81	£ 38,791.81
EMR Sec 106 Projects		
EMR Locality Grant NHP	£ 9,142.04	£ 9,142.04
EMR V.Hall Capital expense	£ 15,000.00	£ 25,000.00
EMR Playgrnds capital expense	£ 15,000.00	£ 25,000.00
EMR Previous FY Obligations		£ 5,775.03
EMR Capital Expense - VH or Playground		
Total (NOT CIL)	£ 112,933.85	£ 167,531.81
EMR CIL Funds	£ 125,615.20	£ 212,949.41
Total	£ 238,549.05	£ 380,481.22

Laura White
Responsible Financial Officer

District Councillor Report – Woodcote & Rotherfield Ward

First year of a Second Term for the Liberal Democrat/Green Administration

In May 2023 the ruling administration at SODC was re-elected with an increased number of councillors; the partnership is now made up of 21 LibDems and 8 Greens. It was pleasing to see that, in the Woodcote & Rotherfield ward, voter turnout increased by 5%.

Cllr David Rouane continues as the Leader of the Council with Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers (LD) and Cllr Robin Bennett (G) sharing the role of Deputy Leader. The result vindicated the administration's focus on nature, climate change, affordable housing and community well-being over the previous four years.

A new draft council plan, entitled The Way Forward is now being consulted on, reinforcing the focus on financial stability, climate and nature and creating a fairer district with support for the most vulnerable and delivering more community, social and affordable housing.

This annual report highlights some of those achievements and explains how our strategic priorities are being translated into delivery by Council officers.

Affordable Housing and Infrastructure Delivery

The SODC Local Plan 2035 includes a policy which ensures that 40% of new housing developments of 10 or more units are affordable, with a variety of tenures included. In 2023/24 156 affordable home completions have been registered so far (with another quarter to go), and a new **Housing Delivery Strategy** adopted in November 2023 will enable SODC to build up its own stock of houses for social rent or to provide funding for third parties such as Community Land Trusts, Housing Associations and almshouse charities to deliver more homes. A small development on the Broadway in Didcot will be the first social housing built by the Council in over 25 years, and we have also been able to purchase over 20 houses with the help of a 40% grant from the Government as part of the Local Authority Housing Fund programme. A new **Empty Homes Policy** was adopted in March 2024 to enable the council's Housing Team to more actively engage with private owners to return properties to the rental market as our social housing waiting list grows.

Our housing team

During the past year we have allocated over £7m of CIL funding for infrastructure projects across the district, helping to mitigate the impact of new housing developments.

Joint Local Plan 2041

Over the past year the Planning Policy team has been working hard on the development of the new Joint Local Plan (covering both South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts), which will guide the kinds of new housing and jobs needed and where they should go, informing planning decisions for the districts. A key milestone for the JLP was the "Preferred Options" consultation held between 10 January and 26 February 2024, which was carried out both online and with in-person events and which attracted a very high number of submissions. Feedback from this consultation is now being processed and analysed, and the next stage will be a consultation on the draft Plan in the autumn of 2024. Having an up-to-date Local Plan is essential to avoid speculative planning applications and unwelcome proposals which do not align with our strategic vision, our housing need or our environmental aspirations for our district.

Key policy proposals include taking out some unsuitable strategic sites including Chalgrove and two sites in the Chilterns National Landscape at Nettlebed. Other important draft policies include much higher energy

efficiency standards for new homes, for biodiversity net gain and for the first time, a policy to protect dark skies and an ambitious policy to protect our waterways from sewage pollution from new developments.

Community Hub becomes permanent

The Community Hub was first set up during Lockdown to provide support for residents during the pandemic. Government funding ceased in 2023 but SODC committed to on-going funding for this important service, particularly as so many residents have been affected by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The Hub has now been made a permanent part of the Council's structure and will continue to offer advice and support on a wide range of issues including financial help, housing and homelessness concerns, Council Tax payments and Health and Wellbeing. The Active Communities team runs a variety of activities and programmes to help people recover from Covid-19 or to help families access free or low cost activities that provide physical and mental wellbeing opportunities.

SODC Grant Schemes including new CIL Grant Fund

Each year SODC provides capital and revenue grants to a wide range of voluntary and community organisations to support their on-going operations or to fund a one-off project or event. In the past year, we have provided Councillor Grant funding in this ward to projects that are in the ward or will benefit its residents. Our grants were heavily oversubscribed and so, difficult decisions had to be made. The projects we were able to support included:

- Nettlebed Parish Council for playground upgrades;
- Brazier's Park for an upgrade to their play area;
- Shedquarters, a local organisation aimed at tackling loneliness and isolation in our communities;
- Cruse Bereavement Support;
- Wallingford Rowing Club;
- Nettlebed Conservators for nature recovery projects.

The newly launched CIL Grant Fund is designed to provide much-needed infrastructure to support the growth of the district as a result of recent housing developments. It is the first time local organisations are able to bid for grant funding from SODC's share of the CIL receipts collected from house builders. At the time of writing, many Expressions of Interest have been registered and funds will be allocated later in 2024.

Our annual capital grants scheme saw large sums awarded to projects including the upgrade of the Mill Meadows playground in Henley, a Community Shop in South Stoke, the River and Rowing Museum for the refurbishment of their Ratty's Refuge outdoor education garden, a number of playground refurbishments across the district, a Girl Guide Hall refurbishment in Didcot, Scout Hall refurbishment at Goring Heath, and retrofitting and upgrading of community buildings at Sonning Common, Tetsworth and North Moreton.

Reducing our Carbon Emissions

As a Council we have a very ambitious target to achieve Net Zero in our own operations by 2025. Over the past year we have continued to decarbonise our leisure and arts centres by switching to non-fossil fuel heating systems, reducing the temperature of water in swimming pools, circulating warm air more efficiently and generally upgrading the fabric of the buildings. This has helped to reduce emissions considerably, but the largest source of emissions for us is our waste management service, which accounts for over 57% of SODC's total emissions. Decarbonising the entire waste fleet at a time when technology is still evolving and while we were waiting for clarity from the Government on future recycling requirements would have been

expensive and impractical, so we haven't been able to make the progress we would have liked. However, we have now agreed a 2-year extension with Biffa and are in the process of acquiring a new fleet of more efficient vehicles and a waste management strategy that will take us further forward towards reaching our goals. We also continue to collaborate with other authorities across Oxfordshire on the delivery of the "Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire" action plan, which includes installing EV charging stations, retrofitting homes to make them more energy efficient, exploring Biodiversity Net Gain projects and renewable energy infrastructure. In the past year we also published a new Air Quality Action Plan to ensure that we continue to monitor air pollution in our towns.

Recycling Champions!

We were very excited to be announced as the country's **top recycling district** in DEFRA's latest tables! Initiatives such as our "Check it before you chuck it" promotional campaign in autumn 2023 demonstrate our commitment to maintaining this position. Thank you to our residents for their continued efforts to reuse and recycle.

Openness and Accountability

We are committed to transparency in the way we make decisions (almost all our public meetings are live-streamed and all papers are in the public domain at least a week in advance) and to reporting on our performance with honesty and accountability. Our quarterly performance reports are online at www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporateplan and our quarterly Climate Action Plan reports are also online at www.southoxon.gov.uk/climateaction.

Financial Stability

When we were first elected in 2019 one of our first priorities was to stabilise the finances of South Oxfordshire District Council, as they were in a poor state. The Council was having to draw on around £3m of reserves each year to plug the funding gap in its operating activities. Over the past few years, we have restored financial stability and for 2023/24 we approved a balanced budget with only a small (sustainable) draw on our reserves. With a large amount in reserves, we were fortunate to benefit from higher interest rates, but we also employed a specialist officer to seek external grant funding to supplement our own resources. This officer has paid for himself several times over by securing government funding for projects such as the decarbonisation of our leisure centres and to cover the increased running costs of our swimming pools. Withdrawing from expensive and inefficient outsourcing contracts has been a key priority, bringing services back in house to ensure better value for money and improved customer service for our residents. We have also increased fees and charges in some areas to ensure the council remains on a steady financial footing, while balancing these increases with the cost of living pressures our residents face.

SODC remains one of the lowest taxing districts in the country. The bulk of the council tax we collect is on behalf of the County Council and the Police.

As ever, we are available to help with residents' questions and concerns:

Jo.Robb@southandvale.gov.uk

James.Norman@southandvale.gov.uk

Cllr Jo Robb and Cllr James Norman

Woodcote & Rotherfield Ward

St Leonard's Church

Welcome

I'd like to say thank you for the wonderful welcome you have given not only to myself, but also to my family. We have really appreciated, and have felt, in the deepest part of our hearts, the love, and welcome you have given all of us. We could not have settled so quickly and happily without your support, without your kindness, and I wish to say a big thank you to all of you, the PCC, and also to Martin and Sue, our churchwardens. Your support and kindness through that difficult time made things so much easier.

I would also like to take a moment to thank all of you, for what you do for the life of our church.



Thank you to all who lead and say prayers in our church services, for those who read, and also help with the social life of our church community, those who make coffee after the Sunday service, and those who help and support the coffee shop, for flower teams, who make our church look so wonderful in different seasons of our churches life, and for all who help in the cleaning making our church tidy.

Thank you for all of you, for your support your kindness, in helping to proclaim our Lord Jesus Christ in Woodcote.

It has been wonderful to have the local Primary school come into the church for Christmas and for harvest.

We also welcomed Woodcote preschool and the Cabin into the church. For singing carols at Christmas time, it was wonderful to have the children's voices, singing with all their might, and sitting listening to the Christmas story.

Before that, we welcomed them for the harvest festival, which you can see in the photo above. It is wonderful have this connection with the local pre schools and that they feel welcome and at home in our church.



It is also been wonderful to have the primary school, come into the church, for also their Christmas Carol service, and the harvest celebrations. We have also had individual classes, coming into our church to look around it, and to explore it, to ask questions about our church, and about the Christian faith. My most favourite questions so far, from a school child has been, "why did the Easter Bunny and Jesus sit down and make Easter?"

It was wonderful at the beginning of the year in January to have 4 candidates, being confirmed at North Stoke. Please do continue to hold them in your prayers as they journey on and grow in faith.

Woodcote

Christmas seems a long time ago, but as we are nearly halfway through 2024 now, Christmas seems to be fast approaching us once more. It was wonderful to celebrate my first Christmas with you last year. The numbers for our Christmas services were up, and it was wonderful to have the choir singing with us for the carols service. Having the choir really enhances our worship. A big thank you for all who contributed and helped with the choir, and a big thank you to Elizabeth who has led the choir for the Christmas services and for Easter. It was also wonderful to have the carols on the green on Christmas eve – what a lovely opportunity for the whole community to come together to sing and to worship the birth of our Lord and saviour!

Back in March we saw and heard the plans that we have had drawn up for the toilet at the back of the church. For this project, please can I encourage you to hold this in your prayers. Please pray for the practical stuff the PCC will need to do, the practical stuff the builders will be doing. Also please hold in your prayers the funds that we will need to have for this project. Prayer is the one big thing that we can all do to support this project.

You may have also heard and seen within the church that we are planning on running a Sunday school on the 4th Sunday of the month.

We have in our church 4 people who are licensed to preach. We will put one of them down to preach once a month, this will free me up for part of the service, so I could take the young people into the vestry for Sunday school. This will be from the Gospel reading until the Peace.

We are very lucky within our church to have so many young people, and it's so important to encourage them in their faith, in their journey with God.



Having a Sunday school within the church service gives a greater opportunity to help them to navigate in life with age relevant teachings from the Bible. Please hold our young people, and this very important ministry, in your prayers.

A big thank you to all who contribute to the life here in St. Leonard's church Woodcote. As I said at the beginning of my report my family and I have been overwhelmed and truly blessed by all of you. Your wonderful welcome and kindness you have shown to myself and to my family will never be forgotten. We have been truly blessed by you and by God's Amazing grace and love. I look forward to ministering with you this year as we proclaim God's Gospel and as we serve and bless our community here in Woodcote.

Revd David Benskin

St Leonard's Church

Woodcote Fete

The Woodcote Fete Committee are pleased to be able to support the Village Hall by hosting the Fete each year. In September 2023 (The hottest day of the year) we were thrilled to be able to donate £2,300 after all our costs back to the Village Hall.

The priority for the Fete is for it to be a community event and we support local charities and organisations to get involved. We are also keen to keep the traditional feel and actively encourage all the village to exhibit their produce, flowers and crafts. We also want the event to be fun for all the family. SOHA have always been generous contributors towards the Fete.

For 2023 we were also fortunate to have additional large donations from the Booker Family at Church Farm and The Oratory Preparatory School. This helps organise additional entertainment such as music from Baum, Maggs and Taylor, the Bubble Man and Jester Giggles.

We are always grateful to Hazel and Jefferies providing us with a skip for the event as well. Rectory Homes provided us with an amazing hamper for the raffle too. The bar always raises a lot of money and is organised by James at South Oxfordshire Brewery.

We would like to thank the Village Hall for Louisa's time in assisting us with invoicing and sending health and safety forms. There is also a list of companies and people that help us out on the day that would be too long to list.

We are pleased to be doing it all again on Saturday September 14th 2024.

Revd David Benskin
St Leonard's Church